

News

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Contact: **Dee Ann Burkes**
101 South Main
Temple, Texas 76501
Phone: 254-742-9811
Fax: 254-742-9939

Texas Ranch Wins Environmental Stewardship Award

TEMPLE, TX - The Richards Ranch of Jacksboro, Texas was one of seven regional environmental winners announced yesterday by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA).

The Richards Ranch has been a family operation for 140 years. Stewardship and sustainability are the pillars upon which sound ranch management practices are built. The team of family members Henry Richards, John Hackley, and Brent Hackley has contributed to the exceptional management of the ranch.

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a co-sponsor of the award with NCBA, has a long-standing relationship with the Richards Ranch, providing technical information and assistance for many years.

Conservation practices implemented by the Richards Ranch include:

- **PRESCRIBED GRAZING** - Almost the entire ranch (15,000 acres) is grazed in management intensive grazing, which involves moving one herd through a number of pastures using short grazing periods in each pasture. Several cells, or groups of pastures, are utilized in this process.

- **WILDLIFE UPLAND HABITAT MANAGEMENT** - Throughout the ranch, close attention is given to the effect that management activities have on wildlife habitat as the effort is made to improve habitat for upland game. Practices utilized that contribute to habitat improvement include prescribed grazing, prescribed burning, range planting, brush management, ponds, wells, troughs, and pipelines. Food plots and protein feeders, protected from livestock, are also utilized. Close attention is paid to the proper harvest of game.
- **BRUSH MANAGEMENT** – In recent years, emphasis has been placed on individual plant treatment along with limited mechanical brush management on mesquite.
- **PRESCRIBED BURNING** – The Richards Ranch has carried out prescribed burning primarily for brush management purposes the last two years. The Hackleys believe the prescribed burning fits well in their wildlife habitat program.
- **PONDS** - A large number of livestock ponds are maintained on the ranch. The ponds are also utilized for fishing and hunting waterfowl.
- **WELL** - Several wells are maintained for livestock water.
- **PIPELINE** - An extensive system of livestock water pipelines is maintained and is one of the keys to the success of their management intensive grazing.

“We are striving to maximize the use of the land, including diversification in hunting and tourism, as well as maximize profits in the beef production business by managing for maximum amounts of forage per acre, thus creating real wealth,” states John Hackley, Richards Ranch general manager. “In order to achieve our quality of life and production goals, we are working for prairies with a variety of high quality forage, dependable and ample water supplies, with a proper balance of brush and wildlife populations.”

The ranch is benefiting from 25 years of management intensive grazing and a holistic approach to making management decisions. The rangeland is in an upward trend, showing an

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increase in quality range plants, better ground cover, and an increase in overall density of vegetation. This increase in the quality of the rangeland is taking place while the ranch is in full livestock production, which is a tribute to overall grazing management.

An outstanding feature of the success of the generations managing the Richards Ranch is their long-time willingness to be involved in the community and to share information and resources. They have hosted countless range and pasture judging contests on the ranch and they continually welcome individuals, visiting groups, the media, and anyone else interested in proper use of natural resources.

“The Richards Ranch has a very strong conservation ethic,” states NRCS State Conservationist Dr. Larry Butler. “They continually work on trying to improve their business and the quality of rangeland health. The NRCS is very proud to be a part of their ranching traditions and the ability to share information and resources.

“I hope that more Americans will come to realize the positive impacts that private landowners can have on our daily lives,” continues Butler. “Those who are good stewards of their resources, like the Richards Ranch, not only provide us with an abundant supply of food and fiber, but they also make our water cleaner, our air cleaner, and provide our wildlife with healthy places to live.

“As we drive across our great state and nation, let’s be glad we have these private land stewards that keep our country beautiful and help to keep our lives healthy,” says Butler. I commend the NCBA, and am glad the NRCS has partnered with them to recognize some of the best stewards in America.”

For more information on NRCS in Texas, visit the website at www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

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